

Consultation Questions on Constituency Office Expenses

Following the information provided on pages 5 to 16, we are now seeking your views in relation to each of our proposals. Please tick the relevant box in the columns to the right and use the space provided at the end of the questions to add any further comments.

Q		Yes	No	No Opinion
1	Do you agree that the current system of Office Cost Expenditure should be replaced with a Constituency Office Expense of no more than £13,500 per Member per annum? (page 7 refers)	✓		
2	Do you agree that an overall limit of not more than £8,000 per annum should be set for all premises rented by Members as a constituency office? (<i>para 4.3 refers</i>)	✓		
3	Do you agree that where a Member shares premises with another Assembly Member the allowable rental limit should be set at not more than £6,000 for each Member in the premises? (<i>para 5.3 refers</i>)	✓		
4	Do you agree that where a Member shares premises with an MP, MEP or Councillor (including a councillor who works for them as an employee) the allowable rental limit would be set at not more than £4,000 per annum for each Member in the premises? (para 5.4 refers)	✓		
5	Do you agree that where any benefit from the payment of rent on a Member's constituency office accrues to a connected or associated person, the allowable rental limit would be set at not more than £4,000 per annum? (para 5.5 refers)	✓		
6	Do you agree that each Member may only claim rent expenses in respect of one set of premises in their constituency? (<i>para 6.1 refers</i>)	✓		
7	Do you agree that where Members voluntarily use their home as their office they should be able to claim a personal allowance of not more than £2,000 in lieu of rent expenses and to defray the costs they incur? (<i>para 7.1 refers</i>)		✓	
8	Do you agree that all leases signed by Members must be non-repairing leases (i.e. leases under which the landlord is obliged to maintain the premises)? (<i>para 8.3 refers</i>)	✓		
9	Do you agree with the Panel's proposals on page 11 relating to constituency office opening hours?	✓		
10	Do you agree with the Panel's proposals on page 11/12 relating to constituency office signage?	✓		

11	Do you agree with the Panel's proposals on page 12 to change the rules on the use of constituency offices for electoral purposes?	✓		
12	Do you agree that Constituency Reports should be produced in line with the guidelines on page 13 and in electronic format only?	✓		
13	Do you agree that a range of electronic office equipment and mobile phones should be provided centrally by the Commission to each Member to assist the operation of their constituency office? (page 13 refers)	✓		
14	Do you agree that all equipment would remain the property of the Commission and would be returnable upon a Member leaving office? (page 14 refers)	✓		
15	Do you agree with the Panel's proposal that all expenses claimed by Members under COE would be subject to an annual audit by External Auditors, through a 20% random sample chosen by the appointed auditors on an annual basis? (page 15 refers)		✓	

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please use the space below to include any further comments you have relating to the Panel's proposals on Members' Constituency Office Expenditure:

The amount of money that is wasted on advertising by MLA's is horrendous. There are other ways of engaging with the public including through social media rather than having copious amounts of propaganda shoved through constituents' letter boxes. The cost of production, print and delivery of any such leaflets must be absolutely staggering to the taxpayer.

If IFRP are serious about getting value for money from these elected representatives, then serious consideration should be given to one main office for all six members per constituency. In areas like Belfast or North Down this should not prove to a problem given the amount of free office space available at present and in the future. Bigger discounts could also possibly given from landlords for multiple occupancy of a building. Politicians need to embrace the vision of a shared future and they can lead by example.

Members of the NIA do not need to have the latest gadgetry by way of iPhones and iPads which is then charged to their COE. Reconditioned Items like this should be bought in bulk be a central department at a reduced rate and then despatched to Members on needs only basis.

For accountability purposes a full audit of all Members expenditure should carried on a yearly basis to ensure that the institution of the NI Assembly is not brought into disrepute.

Consultation Questions on Travel Expenditure

Following the information provided on pages 19 to 24, can we now seek your views below in relation to each of our proposals? Please tick the relevant box in the columns to the right and use the additional space provided at the end of the questions to add any further comments.

Q		Yes	No	No Opinion
16	Do you agree that the payment of home to office mileage for all Members should cease with effect from the start of the New Mandate? (para 15.10 refers)	✓		
17	Do you agree that individual mileage and subsistence claims should be replaced by a flat rate Travel and Subsistence payment, based on criteria set out at paragraph 16.1 for each Member?	✓		
18	If you answered yes to question 17, do you consider the rates detailed in Table 3 on page 23 appropriate?	✓		
19	Do you agree that to qualify for the full amount of TSE, a total of 99 days attendance (i.e. 90% of 110 days) in Parliament Buildings must be registered by the Member in each calendar year? (<i>page 16 refers</i>)	✓		
20	Do you agree that where attendance falls below 99 days, the Member must repay 1% of the allowance in respect of each day below this number within two months of the end of the year? (<i>page 16 refers</i>)	✓		

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please use the space below to include any further comments you have relating to Members' Travel and Subsistence Expenditure:

The fact that members get paid to come to work is an absolute joke particularly when they live within an acceptable distance away from their home. I would deem anything more than a forty mile single journey to be excessive and these members only should be able to claim a limited amount of mileage. They are paid well and can certainly afford to put petrol into their own 4x4's. Members of the general public have a right to be disillusioned when they see local MLA's claim hundreds and sometimes thousands of pounds in travel expenditure. A better policing of the scheme needs to be implemented and Members should provide some form of proof of the actual mileage that they are claiming for.

Childcare Expenses

17 Current system for Members' Childcare Expenses

17.1 The Panel has been asked by the Assembly Commission to consider the removal of Members' childcare allowance. The Panel is mindful that childcare arrangements and support are currently under review at a National level. Within the Assembly, all Members can currently apply for a contribution towards the cost of the care of their children while they are at work.

17.2 In 2012, the Panel determined that an Assembly Member could claim a Childcare Allowance in respect of childcare expenditure which they have incurred for a child or children up to the age of 14. This allowance is taxable.

17.3 The current rates are:

- £40 per week until the child reaches 5 years of age or starts school, whichever is the earlier, and
- thereafter £20 per week until the child reaches the age of 14.

17.4 The removal of a childcare allowance for Members would result in savings of approximately £60k based on the anticipated full year costs for the 2014/15 financial year. The Panel previously proposed in their 2012 Report that the Assembly Commission consider other childcare schemes available, including the establishment of a Childcare Voucher Scheme for Members. The panel is now seeking views on whether to remove or retain the existing scheme.

Consultation Question on Childcare Expenses

Q		Yes	No	No Opinion
21	Do you believe the Panel should continue to provide a childcare allowance to Members based on the rates stated above?		✓	

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Please use the space below to include any further comments you have relating to Members' Childcare Expenses:

Having been in Parliament Buildings on a number of occasions I have borne witness to certain MLAs actually bringing their children into work with them. Do they still claim childcare for these days? I would certainly hope not and this needs to be investigated further.

If the executive was more efficient and actually brought in free childcare for working parents, then there would be no need for Members to claim this allowance. I am fully open to the idea of allowing them to participate in a salary sacrifice scheme like the rest of the population.

Should you wish to respond electronically, please download the consultation proposals by typing or pasting the following link into your internet browser:
<http://ifrp.org.uk/consultation/>

Alternatively you may send your response to:

Independent Financial Review Panel
Room 241, Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX
E-mail: info@ifrp.org.uk

You may wish to note that the names of respondees and, in some cases, the full response, will be published unless you indicate when you submit your response that you do not wish this to happen.

Are you content that your information is published?

YES

NO

NAME: _____

ORGANISATION (IF APPLICABLE):

ADDRESS:

Please note that it is not essential to include your details. You may respond anonymously if you prefer to do so.